

CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING *WAHRHEIT UND METHODE*[†]

LEO STRAUSS AND HANS-GEORG GADAMER

Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences
202 Junipero Serra Boulevard
Stanford, California, U.S.A.

Professor Hans-Georg Gadamer
Universität
Heidelberg
Germany

February 26, 1961

Dear Mr. Gadamer:

I write in English because my handwriting has become very hard to read and I have no one here who could conveniently type something written in German.

I am very grateful to you for having sent me your book and I am very glad that you have written it. It is an important work. As far as I know it is the most important work written by a Heideggerian. It is a work *de longue haleine* and it shows again the wisdom of waiting. Reading it meant to me something more than reading most other books. I was reminded of my youth in Germany, of Natorp's seminars, of many conversations, last but not least of our last conversation in Heidelberg in 1954. A certain community of "background" helped me in understanding your book to the extent to which I understood it. As I knew in advance, we have marched from that common ground in opposite directions — hence the limitations of my understanding your book. Before I say something on this point, I wish to thank you for the instruction which I already owe to your book. You have brought to my attention quite a few important things of which I was unaware until now. Above all, I saw that I must reread your book with much greater care than I have yet been able to give it — at a time of my own choosing when I shall be in immediate need of it. Take therefore what follows as what it is meant to be, as not more than a first reaction.

I find myself at a great disadvantage in speaking to you. You possess and present a comprehensive doctrine. This doctrine touches indeed on quite a few things of which I have experience or to which I have given thought. Still I can lay claim to judgment only as regards a part of your book. Your doctrine is to a considerable extent a translation of Heidegger's questions, analyses and hints into a more academic medium: there is a chapter on Dilthey and none on Nietzsche. As it seems to me, the principle underlying your translation is the distinction between "methodical" and "substantive" as used in p.92 note, beginning. This distinction is related to the distinction between "existential" and "existentiell" as used on p.248 — to a distinction with which the first distinction can hardly be identified, as would seem to be indicated in the very title of your book. Differently stated, it does not appear from your presentation that the radicalization and universalization of hermeneutics is essentially contemporary [21]* with the approach of the "world-night" or the *Untergang des Abendlands*: the "existential" meaning of that universalization, the catastrophic context to which it belongs, thus does not come out. I am tempted to speak of the hermeneutic situation *par excellence*: the situation which for the first time calls for the understanding of any particular hermeneutic task in the light of universal philosophic hermeneutics and which for all we know may be succeeded by a situation in which something resembling the pre-historicist hermeneutics may be appropriate.

I could state this difficulty also as follows. You preserve the academic continuity by accepting, although reinterpreting, "*das Faktum der Geisteswissenschaften*" by "a thinking reader." You define the difference between the reader in general and the historian by saying that the historian is concerned with "the whole of the historical tradition" (232): how is this possible given the "finiteness" of man? Against your will you seem to preserve "the historical consciousness of universal comprehension." You do not mean to say of course that history as a discipline can do what no historian or agglomeration of historians can do.

It is not easy for me to recognize in your hermeneutics my own experience as an interpreter. Yours is a "theory of hermeneutic experience" which as such is a universal theory. Not only is my own hermeneutic experience very limited — the experience which I possess makes me doubtful whether a universal hermeneutic

[†] The editor is grateful to Professor Gadamer for making these letters available for publication. A public reply on the questions raised here was included in the 2nd edition of *Wahrheit und Methode*, pp. 503-512. No further correspondence on these subjects took place.

* These numbers refer to the pagination of the original letters, in this case the beginning of the second page — Editor.

theory which is more than "formal" or external is possible. I believe that the doubt arises from the feeling of the irretrievably "occasional" character of every worthwhile interpretation. Be that as it may, I shall state the difficulty which I encountered in a "rhapsodic" way, by giving some examples which I shall number without ordering them.

[1] I agree with your demand that the interpreter must reflect on his hermeneutic situation and he must apply the text to that situation (307); but I contend that prior to modern historicism all intelligent people whom [3] I have studied and who spoke about the understanding of old and foreign books have done this; my last experience in this matter was Maimonides. I agree with your view according to which a doctrine cannot be an object of contemplation, to be interpreted as the "expression" of a certain kind of life, but must be understood in its claim to be true and this claim must be met. Meeting it means that I can, nay, must accept it as true or reject it as untrue or make a distinction or recognize my inability to decide and therefore the necessity to think or learn more than I know at present. This is what you in fact do – see e.g. 459 line 7 ff. I do not believe however that this state of things is brought out when one speaks of "a fusion of horizons." Surely my horizon is enlarged if I learn something important. But it is hard to say that Plato's horizon is enlarged if a modification of his doctrine proves to be superior to his own version.

[2] At least in the most important cases, earlier or contemporary, I have always seen that there remained in the text something of the utmost importance which I did not understand, i.e. that my understanding or my interpretation was very incomplete; I would hesitate to say however that no one can complete it or that the finiteness of man as man necessitates the impossibility of adequate or complete or "the true understanding" (cf. 355). You deny this possibility (375). Your denial is not justified by the fact that there is a variety of hermeneutic situations: the difference of starting points and hence of the ascents does not lead to the consequence that the plateau which all interpreters as interpreters wish to reach is not one and the same.

[3] You speak of the essential productivity (and not mere reproductivity) of the interpreter (280, 448). I just read Karl Reinhardt on the *Klassische Walpurgisnacht* – an essay from which I learned very much; its great merit consists in Reinhardt's understanding of what Goethe himself explicitly thought but did not express in such a way that the reader can immediately understand it. Reinhardt's "mediation" is simply ministerial to the text and precisely by being this most intelligently, it is praiseworthy. – [4] The interpreter must make explicit what the author merely presupposes, especially if it is something which we do not presuppose. But in doing this the interpreter does not understand the author better than the author understood himself if the presupposition in question can be shown to have been generally known at his time or if accepting the presupposition in question is wiser than not accepting it (cf. the many unreasonable accusations of *naïveté* hurled at the classics).

[4] I agree with you when you describe the difference between the author and the interpreter as the difference between the model and following the model (321). But surely not every text has this model character and not even all great texts have it (cf. the difference between the *Nichomachean Ethics* and the *Leviathan*). Reflection on this example might show that the tradition and the continuity disappears once one begins to interpret.

[5] As regards the productivity of the interpreter, the historian who studies e.g. Thucydides within the context of economic history surely addresses to the author a new question; his concern differs profoundly from Thucydides' own, but he must give an account of Thucydides' almost complete silence on economic subjects; he must understand that silence, i.e. Thucydides' unconcern with those things; he must answer the question of how economic things appear to Thucydides. The answer to this last question, the most interesting question which occurs within his investigation, is nothing but a reproduction of Thucydides' thought on the human things in general.

But what is the basis of these and similar difficulties which I encountered in reading your book? You are fundamentally concerned with "*Wirkungsgeschichte*," with something which is not necessarily a theme of the interpreter (432); you see what is necessarily thematic for the interpreter in the light of what is not necessarily thematic for him (452 top), the *proton pros hemas* in the light of the *proton physei*. You know then the *proton physei* – I cannot say that I do. In other words, you lead one not from what is first for us as readers or interpreters, but from certain false theories and their criticism, to what is first in itself. [5]

Your book contains a philosophy of art but the relation of philosophy to art is not made thematic beyond a rejection of the view of Hegel (and therewith of Plato and Aristotle) according to which philosophic understanding is superior to the artistic understanding. I wonder whether this is not due to insufficient "historical" reflection. You say on p. 77 that the concept of art has become questionable since the aesthetic consciousness which created that concept has become questionable. Yet you entitle the section which begins immediately afterward: "Recovery of the question concerning the truth of Art" – as if that question and hence the concept of art antedated the aesthetic consciousness. (Cf. also 94. In 129 you accept an abstraction made by the discredited aesthetic consciousness. Similarly on p. 157 you accept a consequence of the discredited historical consciousness.) If the concept of Art has become questionable, if therefore a recovery of something lost is indicated, I would draw the conclusion that we must begin by going back *behind* that concept or the consciousness which produced it. We would thus be led back to the view that what we call Art was originally understood as *sophia* (cf. Xeno-

phon *Memorabilia* I 4.2-3). At this stage it was recognized that “art is knowledge.” But what kind of knowledge? Surely not philosophic knowledge. With the emergence of philosophy there arises a tension between philosophy and poetry, a tension essential to both philosophy and poetry as the philosophers necessarily know and as the poets may know. To understand that tension, one must hear both sides (cf. *Republic* X on the feud between philosophy and poetry). The greatest document of the case of poetry versus philosophy is Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. It is no accident that the classical document is a comedy and not a tragedy. However this may be, in studying the *Clouds* (and the other Aristophanean comedies), I learned something which I could not learn from any modern: the deepest modern interpretation of Aristophanean comedy (Hegel’s) is much less adequate than Plato’s Aristophanizing presentation of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*. (Heidegger is silent on comedy. As for Nietzsche, cf. *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, aphorism 1.) In a word, I believe that the basis of the modern philosophy of art — even of that which is free from the aesthetic prejudice — is too small.

The most comprehensive question which you discuss is indicated by the term “relativism.” You take “the relativity of all human values” (54), of all world-views (423) for [6] granted. You realize that this “relativistic” thesis is itself meant to be “absolutely and unconditionally true” (424). It is not clear to me whether you regard the “logical” difficulty as irrelevant (which I would not) or as not by itself decisive. I believe that there is no “logical” difficulty for the following reason. The historical situation to which the universal hermeneutics or the hermeneutic ontology belongs is not a situation like other situations; it is “the absolute moment” — similar to the belonging of Hegel’s system to the absolute moment in the historical process. I say similar and not identical. I would speak of a negatively absolute situation: the awakening from *Seinsvergessenheit* belongs to the *Erschütterung alles Seienden*, and what one awakens to is not the final truth in the form of a system but rather a question which can never be fully answered — a level of inquiry and thinking which is meant to be the final level. I remind you of the end of your contribution to the Reinhardt *Festschrift*: you do not expect that the insight into the historicity of one’s own existence and therewith the impossibility of one’s transcending one’s own horizon will be superseded in the way in which Parmenides and Hegel were superseded. Your position reminds me of Natorp’s who said that the true philosophy is Kant’s who discovered the fundamental problem in its adequate form (the few dogmatic relics or egg-shells notwithstanding). You admit this by speaking of “the completed experience” (339) which is surely not completed in Hegel’s sense but which is completed nevertheless: in the decisive respect experience has come to its end; a fundamental change of philosophic orientation — a change comparable in significance to the change, say from Hegel to Heidegger — is not envisaged.

Let me cast a glance from here at “the relativity of all human values.” As you stated, existence is in itself *verstehend*; this understanding is of course “also” understanding of *to kalon kai to dikaion*, and hence it is essentially “evaluating” (224-225). This means that existence is necessarily existence within or through a specific *Sitte-Sittlichkeit* which is binding, not as merely imposed, but as understood, as evident; the evidence of the specific *Sitte-Sittlichkeit* is part and parcel of the evidence of the specific understanding of the world. This means that for existence the problem of relativism never arises. Now the hermeneutic ontology or however it may be called is itself historical in the sense that it is rooted in a specific “historical world” and hence in a specific *Sitte-Sittlichkeit* which is bound to partake of the final character of the hermeneutic ontology. One could [7] perhaps say more precisely that *the thematic ontology belongs to a world in its decay* when the *Sitte-Sittlichkeit* peculiar to it has lost its evidence or binding power and that therefore the hermeneutic ontology must — of course not dream of fabricating a new *Sitte-Sittlichkeit* but — prepare men for its possible coming or make men receptive to its possible occurrence. Yet even “between” the two worlds the basic distinction between the noble and the base and its crucial implications (e.g. regarding the status of love on the one hand and hatred and resentment on the other, or regarding such things as “*Geschwisterlichkeit*” — *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 67 — and hence the family) retain their evidence or binding power for every one who is not a brute. The generality of these and similar things does not deprive them of definite meaning as you yourself make clear in 295ff. Above all, these things — in contradistinction to “world” (cf. 432) and other *Existentialien* — are necessarily thematic within all “horizons.”

On the basis of the “relativity of all values” Dilthey’s “untiring reflection on the objection of ‘relativism’” (224) is, I believe, inevitable. I am in no way attracted by Dilthey, but as regards the point mentioned I would defend him against your criticism. To what you say on p. 225 I would retort that you forget the Socratic doubt which is neither the methodic doubt nor the doubt which comes “by itself.”

May I use this opportunity for asking you for two favors. The publisher who has acquired the rights to my book on Spinoza wishes to bring out a new edition. I feel that the book would need a new preface. I could not think of a better one than Krüger’s review which appeared in the DLZ in 1931 or so. Would you be so good as to find out for me from Krüger or his wife whether the permission to reprint that review would be granted and, from someone familiar with such matters, whom the publisher would have to address in order to get the permission to reprint from the DLZ. — I would be helped if I could get a photo of the page or pages in which Oetinger speaks of Shaftesbury regarding “common sense” (27 top of your book). Could you arrange that such a photo be sent to me at my expenses, perhaps with the help of my former student Dannhauser who I believe is now studying philos-

ophy in Heidelberg? I thank you in advance.

I conclude with the repeated expression of thanks for your book.

Cordially yours,
Leo Strauss

Wald bei Zürich
Oberer Hiltisberg

5. 4. 1961

Wald bei Zürich*
Oberer Hiltisberg

5 April 1961

Lieber Herr Strauss,

Ihr ausführliches Eingehen auf mein Buch bedeutet mir viel. Ich weiß, daß es uns allen nicht leicht wird, anderen Gedankengängen wirklich zu folgen. Ich weiß das auch aus eigener Erfahrung mit Ihren Büchern, wo ich mich oft begnügen mußte, das für mich Fruchtbare herauszuholen. Umso mehr bin ich Ihnen dankbar, daß Sie mir Ihre ersten Observationen mitteilen. Es kommt hinzu, daß ich hier vielleicht an eine Aufgabe gegangen bin, für die ich wenig talentiert bin: aus der Vielfachheit interpretatorischer Übung und Erfahrung die Einheit einer "Theorie" zu entwickeln, setzt eine völlige Umstellung voraus, bei der ich oft genug festgefahren bin. Und ob es mir am Ende langer Mühen gelungen ist, etwas Konsistentes zu sagen, bleibt abzuwarten. Erlauben Sie, daß ich es immerhin einmal versuche, Ihren Bemerkungen gegenüber die "Konsistenz" meines Buches, soweit ich kann, zu verteidigen.

Sie haben ganz Recht, wenn Sie von einer Transposition Heideggers in ein akademisches Medium sprechen, Dilthey statt Nietzsche. Das ist wohl so, nicht aus Absicht, sondern aus dem Bedürfnis nach Selbstklärung, das mich als Philologen und Interpreten philosophischer Texte überkam. Aber man muß sich doch fragen, ob diese "Transposition" ohne wesentliche Veränderungen möglich ist. Zwar, gegen O. Becker oder K. Löwith kann ich mich auf den "transzendentalen" Sinn von Heideggers *Sein und Zeit* berufen. Aber worin ich mich sonst noch auf Heidegger berufe, indem ich "Verstehen" als ein "Geschehen" zu denken suche, wird doch in eine ganz andere Richtung gewendet. Nicht die *vollendete Seinsvergessenheit*, die "Seinsnacht," ist mein Ausgangspunkt, sondern im Gegenteil — das sage ich gegen Heidegger wie gegen Buber — die Unwirklichkeit einer solchen Behauptung. Das gilt auch für unser Verhältnis zur Überlieferung. Wir sind durch Schleiermacher und die romantische Hermeneutik in die falsche Radikalität eines "universalen" Verstehens (als Vermeidens [2] von "Mißverständnis") gedrängt worden. Ich sehe darin eine

Dear Mr Strauss,

Your detailed examination of my book means much to me. I know that for all of us it is not easy to really follow other ways of thought. I know that also from my own experience with your books, where I often have had to be content to get out what is fruitful for me. I am that much more grateful to you, that you communicate to me your first observations. In addition to that, I have here possibly embarked upon a task for which I have little talent: to develop, from the manifoldness of interpretative practice and experience the unity of a "theory," presupposes a complete transposition, with which I have often enough been bogged down. And whether at the end of long pains I have been successful in saying something consistent remains to be seen. Allow me at least to try, as far as I am able, to defend the "consistency" of my book against your remarks.

You are entirely right when you speak of a transposition of Heidegger into an academic medium, Dilthey instead of Nietzsche. That may well be, not out of intention, but rather out of the need for self-clarification that came over me as philologist and interpreter of philosophical texts. But one must ask oneself whether this "transposition" is possible without essential alterations. It is true, against O. Becker or K. Löwith, I can appeal to the "transcendental" sense of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. But where I otherwise still appeal to Heidegger — in that I attempt to think of "understanding" as an "event" — is turned however in an entirely different direction. My point of departure is not the *complete forgetfulness of being*, the "night of being," rather on the contrary — I say this against Heidegger as well as against Buber — the unreality of such an assertion. That holds good also for our relation to the tradition. We have been pressed by Schleiermacher and the romantic hermeneutics into the false radicality of a "universal" understanding (as the avoidance of "misunderstanding"). I see in that a

* Translated by George Elliott Tucker. The translator wishes to thank Susanne Klein for assistance with the German idioms.

falsche Theorie für eine bessere Wirklichkeit. Insofern verteidige ich in der Tat das "Faktum der Geisteswissenschaften" – aber gegen sich selbst! P. 323 will im Zusammenhang sagen, daß weder der Philologe noch der Historiker sich richtig verstehen, weil sie die "Endlichkeit" vergessen. Ich glaube nicht an eine Wiederkehr prä=historischer Hermeneutik, sondern an ihren tatsächlichen Fortbestand, der nur durch "Historie" verdeckt ist.

Daß das Zur-Geltung-bringen dieser verdeckten Wirklichkeit eine theoretisch unmögliche Aufgabe sei (p. 2, 3. Abschnitt Ihres Briefes) leuchtet mir nicht ein. Jedenfalls ist Ihr Betonen des "okkasionellen" Charakters jeder Interpretation m.E. kein Einwand gegen eine Theorie, die eben dies behauptet, sondern eine Vorform dieser Theorie selber (denn Sie selbst meinen das ja gerade im allgemeinen und nicht "okkasionell").

Und nun zu den Einzelbemerkungen.

[1] verstehe ich nicht das *But* I contend. Das ist doch meine eigene These! Sie ergänzt sich nur durch die zweite, daß nach dem Aufgang des "historischen Bewußtseins" diese Applikation eine besondere Form gewinnt, die der "Horizontverschmelzung." Für Plato gab es das natürlich nicht! Es ist das erst eine Folge des historischen Bewußtseins, daß man demselben nachweisen muß, daß es nicht erkennen kann, ohne zu applizieren.

[2] hier kann ich an keine echte Differenz zwischen Ihnen und mir glauben: *wish to reach*: natürlich! Aber Sie verstehen meine These zu partikular. Das tritt auch an dem Punkt [3] heraus. Reinhardts Interpretation hat noch eine andere Seite als die des ministerial to the text. In 50 Jahren wird man klarer sehen als heute, was diese andere Seite ist. Warum er dies und nicht jenes, so und nicht anders, erläutert hat. Was er vernachlässigte, was er überbetonte. Gerade eine so vortreffliche, praiseworthy Interpretation, die Sie und ich dankbar belehrt aufnehmen, spricht uns alle mit aus. [3]

[4] p. 321 meint die "Humanisten"! Für Ihr Beispiel, *Eth. Nic.* und *Leviathan*, ist statt "Nachfolge" ein viel komplizierterer Vorgang zu denken. Aber ich *vermute* (obwohl ich da nicht mit Kompetenz spreche), daß der *Leviathan* auch eine "Wahrheit" enthält, der es zu folgen gilt (und nicht nur Irrlehre).

[5] Nein, der *historian of economics* würde, meine ich, über sich selber angesichts dieser Feststellung nachdenklich werden müssen. Darin läge seine "Produktivität" im Verstehen.

p. 4 the basis: ist das denn kein *proteron pros hemas*, die herrschende "Theorie des Historismus und historischen Objektivismus"? Und ist es denn kein methodisch richtiges Vorgehen, diese zu berichtigen? Wir haben doch alle die gleiche konkrete Erfahrung, auf die wir bei diesen theoretischen Fragen blicken. Um die unthematische Wirklichkeit der Wirkungsge-

false theory for a better reality. Insofar I defend indeed the "fact of the cultural sciences" – but against itself! P. 323 intends to say in context, that *neither* the philologist *nor* the historian understand themselves correctly, because they forget the "finiteness." I do not believe in a return of pre=historicist hermeneutics, rather in its *factual* continuation, which is only hidden by "history."

That the bringing to light of this hidden reality is a theoretically impossible task (p. 2, paragraph 3 of your letter) is not evident to me. In any case, your emphasis of the "occasional" character of every interpretation is in my estimation no reproach against a theory which asserts just this, rather an anticipation of this theory itself (for you yourself mean that explicitly in general and not "occasionally").

And now to the particular remarks.

[1] I do not understand the "*but* I contend." That is rather my *own* thesis! It is supplemented only by the second, that *after* the rise of the "historical consciousness" this application takes on a special form, that of the "fusion of horizons." For Plato that naturally did not exist! It is only a *result* of the historical consciousness, that one must prove to it that it cannot know without being applied.

[2] Here I cannot believe in any genuine difference between you and I: "*wish to reach*": naturally! But you understand my thesis too particularly. That appears also in point [3]. Reinhardt's interpretation has still another side as that of the "ministerial to the text." In 50 years one will see clearer than today what this other side is. *Why* he commented on this and not that, so and not otherwise. What he neglected, what he overemphasized. Just such an excellent, "praiseworthy" interpretation, which you and I gratefully receive instruction from, *expresses ourselves with it*.

[4] p. 321 refers to the "humanists"! For your example, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Leviathan*, a much more complicated process is, instead of "following," to be thought of. But I *suspect* (although I do not speak here with competence) that the *Leviathan* also contains a "truth," which it is valid to *follow* (and not *only* an erroneous teaching).

[5] No, the "historian of economics" would, I say, have to be reflective *about himself* with respect to this discernment. *Therein* would lie his "productivity" in understanding.

p. 4, "the basis": Is that then not *proteron pros hemas*, the reigning "theory of historicism and historical objectivism"? And is it then not the methodologically correct procedure to correct this? We all have however the same concrete experience which we look at with these theoretical questions. In order to bring to light the unthematic reality of historical influence,

schichte ans Licht zu stellen, bin ich auf unthematische Wirklichkeit der interpretierenden *Sprache* eingegangen (Sie ist, wie *alles* Sprechen, nicht auf sich selbst gerichtet).

p. 5: Ja, ich glaube zwar, den *Kunstabgriff* der Sache nach durch seine Verwendung in der Kritik am ästhetischen Bewußtsein *gewandelt* zu haben. Aber ich gebe zu, daß Ihr Hinweis auf Aristophanes' *Clouds* wichtige Fragen einschließt, die ich hätte sehen sollen. Meine "Theorie der Kunst" ist nur *präparatorisch* für meine hermeneutische These, und deshalb vielleicht sehr einseitig und schief.

Zu pp. 5-6: Ich finde mich in Ihrer Katastrophenbegründung der "hermeneutischen Ontologie" nicht zurecht. Meine Meinung ist, wie die Einleitung erläutert, die umgekehrte. Ich glaube *gar* nicht, daß wir "zwischen" zwei Welten leben. Weder Heidegger noch Buber kann ich darin folgen. Nur der Prophet, der das gelobte Land schon sieht, hätte m. E. die Möglichkeit, dergleichen zu sagen. — Ich *erinnere* statt dessen die *eine* Welt, von der ich [4] allein weiß und die in allem decay ihre Evidenz und Bindekraft *weit weniger verloren hat*, als sie selber sich einredet. (N.b. p. 339 *completed experience* ist die "Vollendung" dessen, der keine Erfahrung, die es zu machen gilt, sich selber durch Dogmatik versperrt. Sie ist das *Gegenteil* eines Endes von Erfahrungen!)

Verzeihen Sie, wenn ich das so schnell herunterhaue. Aber die Reaktion des Autors hat ja ihre eigenen Gesetze. Was ich *eigentlich* tun müßte, wäre etwas ganz anderes: Ihnen an Ihren Arbeiten zeigen, was ich meine — denn ich wäre mißverstanden, wenn man nicht Ernst nähme, daß ich ein *falsches Denken* über ein Verfahren berichtigen möchte, das, dort wo es gelingt (d.h. etwas an der Überlieferung wirklich *aufschließt*), selber richtig ist.

Vielleicht wird Ihnen die Tendenz meines Buches deutlicher, wenn ich hinzufüge: Heidegger gegenüber habe ich seit Jahrzehnten verfochten, daß auch sein "Satz" oder "Sprung" zurück *hinter* die Metaphysik *durch diese selbst* allein ermöglicht wird. (= wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein!) Was ich durch Heidegger verstanden zu haben meine (und was mir von meiner protestantischen Herkunft her einlösbar ist), ist vor allem, daß die Philosophie lernen muß, ohne die Idee eines unendlichen Intellektes auszukommen. Ich habe versucht, eine entsprechende Hermeneutik zu entwerfen. Aber ich kann das nur, indem ich — sehr gegen Heideggers Absichten — alles, was ich sehe, am Ende in einem solchen hermeneutischen *Bewußtsein* zur Ausweisung bringe. Ich glaube wirklich, den späteren Heidegger verstanden zu haben, d.h. seine "Wahrheit." Aber ich muß sie mir "beweisen" — an der Erfahrung, die meine eigene ist, und das ist die, die ich "hermeneutische Erfahrung" genannt habe.

Zu Ihren beiden Bitten:

[1] Mit Krügers habe ich gesprochen. Sie sind einverstanden. Ein Verlagsrecht besteht *nicht* (Zeit-

I have gone into the unthematic reality of the interpreting *language* (it is, as *all* speaking, not directed towards itself).

p. 5: Yes, it is true I believe that the concept of *art* has accordingly changed through its application in the critique of the aesthetic consciousness. But I admit that your reference to Aristophanes' *Clouds* contains important questions which I should have seen. My "theory of art" is only *preparatory* for my hermeneutic thesis, and therefore perhaps very one-sided and off the point.

To p. 5-6: I cannot make out your catastrophe explanation of "hermeneutic ontology." My opinion is, as the Introduction explains, the opposite. I do not believe *at all* that we live "between" two worlds. I can follow neither Heidegger nor Buber in this. Only the prophet who already sees the promised land would have, in my estimation, the possibility to say the like. I *remember*, instead of this, the *one* world which I alone know, and which in all decay *has lost far less* of its evidence and cohesion than it talks itself into (N.b. p. 339), "completed experience," is the "completion" of he who does not bar himself through dogmatics from experience that should be undergone. It is the *opposite* of an end of experiences!)

Pardon me, if I bang that out so quickly. But the reaction of the author has its own laws. What I *really* would have to do, would be something else entirely: to show you in your work what I mean — for I would be misunderstood if one does not take seriously that I would like to correct a *false thought* about a procedure, which, there where it succeeds (*i.e.*, really *discloses* something in the tradition), is itself correct.

Perhaps the tendency of my book will become clearer to you if I add: I have advocated against Heidegger for decades, that also his "bound" or "leap" back *behind* metaphysics is alone made possible through this itself (= historically operative consciousness!). What I believe to have understood through Heidegger (and what I can testify to from my protestant background) is, above all, that philosophy must learn to do without the idea of an infinite intellect. I have attempted to draw up a corresponding hermeneutics. But I can only do that, in that I — much against Heidegger's intentions — make visible in such a hermeneutic *consciousness* in the end everything that I see. I believe really to have understood the late Heidegger, *i.e.*, his "truth." But I must "prove" it to myself — with the experience which is my own, and that is what I have called "hermeneutic experience."

To both of your requests:

[1] I have spoken with the Krügers. They have agreed. There are no publisher's rights (journal ar-

schriftenaufsätze sind nach [5] 10 Jahren, glaube ich, frei).

[2] Oetinger, *De sensu communi* – ein Buch, das Sie im Ganzen lesen sollten. Eines der *wichtigsten* Bücher, die ich gelesen habe. Ich bereite einen Neudruck vor (sehr selten!). Das Buch ist nur in Tübingen. Ich kann aber die betreffenden Seiten, die ich nicht mehr auswendig nennen kann, in Tübingen feststellen und reproduzieren lassen (Es ist meines Erinnerns nur eine *generelle* Berufung auf Shaftesbury). Soll ich das? Oder wollen Sie meinem Rat folgen und das Ganze lesen? (Es ist eine Kritik an Leibniz, die sich auf die Seite Newtons stellt).

Herzlichen Gruß,
Ihr
Hans-Georg Gadamer

ticles are after ten years, I believe, free).

[2] Oetinger, *De sensu communi* – a book which you should read in entirety. One of the *most important* books that I have read. I am preparing a new printing (very rare!). The book is only in Tübingen. I can however find out in Tübingen the respective pages, which I can no longer name by heart, and have them reproduced (It is in my recollection only a *general* appeal to Shaftesbury). Shall I do that? Or will you follow my advice and read the whole? (It is a critique of Leibniz, that takes the side of Newton).

With cordial greetings,
Yours,
Hans-Georg Gadamer

Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences
202 Junipero Serra Boulevard
Stanford, California, U.S.A.

Professor Hans-Georg Gadamer
Philosophisches Seminar
Universität
Heidelberg
Germany

May 14, 1961

Dear Mr. Gadamer:

I am sorry for the long delay in answering your letter but there have been very many external impediments.

It is strange that there should be a difference between us where you take a stand against Heidegger and I stand for him. I shall state this difference in a way which probably does not do full justice to you. I believe that you will have to admit that there is a fundamental difference between your post-historicist hermeneutics and pre-historicist (traditional) hermeneutics; it suffices to refer to your teaching regarding the work of art and language which at least as you present it is not in any way a traditional teaching; this being so, it is necessary to reflect on the situation which demands the new hermeneutics, *i.e.* on our situation; this reflection will necessarily bring to light a radical crisis, an unprecedented crisis and this is what Heidegger means by the approach of the world night. Or do you deny the necessity and the possibility of such a reflection? I see a connection between your silence on this crucial question and your failure to reply to my remarks regarding "relativism."

I agree with you that our practical agreements as interpreters is much greater than our theoretical dissension seems to show. Still I cannot accept a theory of hermeneutics which does not bring out more emphatically than yours the essentially ministerial element of interpretation proper which is concerned with understanding the thought of someone else as he meant it. Our difference in this respect becomes clearest to me in what you say in the second paragraph of p. 3 of your letter (concerning my example of the economic historian and Thucydides): what the historian of economics learns *about himself* (*i.e.* about economic history) he learns by listening most carefully *to Thucydides* or by an unqualified *return* to Thucydides. This example also indicates the fundamental difference between us: *la querelle des anciens et des modernes*, in which *querelle* we have taken different sides; our difference regarding hermeneutics is only a consequence of this fundamental difference. I do not believe that either of us possesses full clarity about this issue: all the more reason that we should continue to try to learn from one another. I promise you that I shall do this. [2]

I am very grateful to you for having talked to Krügers. As for Oetinger, I shall gladly follow your advice and read his whole book but as appears from your letter the book is not available now. When will your edition of the book be out? I suppose not immediately. But I need his reference to Shaftesbury very soon, and therefore a photo of the page or pages in which he speaks about Shaftesbury. I asked my student, Werner Dannhauser, to

approach you in this matter so that you have the minimum of trouble with it.

I asked my publisher to send you two books of mine which you probably have not seen. In my opinion they confirm my "theory" of hermeneutics but you are likely to think the opposite. With kindest regards,

Sincerely yours,
Leo Strauss